

CURTO'S PLACE
(Shute's Bar)
322 Sixth Street
Calumet
Houghton County
Michigan

HABS MI-424
MI-424

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

CURTO'S PLACE (Shute's Bar)

HABS No. MI-424

- Name: "Curto's Place." The building was identified as "Curto's Place" in a 1910 photograph; the appellation was inscribed on an awning. The historic photograph hangs on a wall inside the bar today. Earlier, however, in an advertisement in the 1901 Copper Handbook, the engineering and contracting firm of Coogan and Strothenke of Milwaukee mentioned work they had completed in the Upper Peninsula. In addition to the Houghton County Court House and several buildings for the Calumet and Hecla Mining Company, they mentioned "Curto's Palm Garden." This seems to be the only such reference to the building under that name; moreover, local people who were queried about this citation do not recall anyone having actually called it "Curto's Palm Garden." The 1916-17 Polk's Directory includes Curto's block in its list of public buildings as well.
- Location: 322 Sixth Street, Calumet Village, Houghton County, Michigan.
- Present owner: Mary Shute and Bernard M. Shute.
- Present use: The first floor of the building is used as a bar; the second floor – although presently unoccupied – is fitted out to be an apartment.
- Significance: Curto's Place is a typical late nineteenth-century storefront that contains a bar of exceedingly high quality. It was built in two stages, in 1895 and then in 1900. Elaborate plaster ceiling decorations, and a vigorous back bar, provide a setting for the highlight of the bar: a stained glass canopy over the large central section of the back bar. This may be a unique survival of the most elegant of saloon design. Historically, the bar is significant in that it has been owned and operated by only two families since its erection.
- Historian: Kevin Harrington, June 1975.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical history

1. Dates of erection: The front half of the building was constructed in 1895; the back in 1900. Although Curto bought the property in 1882, the purchase price of \$408.00 makes it unlikely that a structure of any type was on the site. Curto's mortgage of \$300.00 in 1887, which was discharged in 1891, would seem large enough to build only a very cheap frame structure, or to make some internal improvements to a structure that he had

erected with his own savings. His obituary in the Copper Country Evening News noted that he worked for Calumet and Hecla Mining Company until going into business for himself in 1893. Thus the actions before then, already described, do not indicate that the current building had been erected. In 1895 he gave a mortgage to Jeremiah Garvin of Genesee County, New York. It seems probable that the front half of the building, and some of the interior improvements were accomplished at this time. On the interior I would speculate that the bar, back bar and cabinets were installed at this time but not the stained glass canopy. That, and the ceiling decorations would probably have been done in 1900, when he obtained a mortgage for \$6000.00 from a local bank. This seems most likely since the ceiling decorations are not effectively terminated where they intersect with the back bar.

2. Architect: The architect responsible for the 1895 portion of the building is not known at this writing; however, it is likely Charles K. Shand of Calumet designed the 1900 section. The ceiling decorations, for example, are similar to those Shand is known to have designed (or selected from a catalog) for the Calumet Theater which was built two lots away at the same time. Shand was also a witness to the mortgage that Curto gave in 1900, something connecting him to the site directly.

3. Original and subsequent owners: Effectively, the building and bar have been owned and operated by only two families, the Curtos until 1919 and the Shutes since then. Mike Shute had been operating the bar for several years before he had the money to buy it from the bank. The chain of title information is as follows:

Curto's Place is located on the north 19 feet of lot 16 in block 20 of the plat of the Village of Red Jacket, now Calumet, in Michigan. The standard lot in this block (20) measures 58' x 98'; the parcel on which Curto's Place stands measures 19 x 98'.

May 12, 1879 L 20, p. 621 of Deeds
Bartholomew Quello and Catherine his wife
WARRANTY DEED - to -
James Miglio
for \$482.25

The north part of lot 16, block 20, measuring 19' x 98'. This is the first conveyance in which the block has been subdivided. A building was already on the site or was being contemplated.

August 26, 1882 L 20, p. 623 of Deeds
James Miglio and his wife Angelena
WARRANTY DEED - to -
Mark Curto
for \$408.00

December 27, 1887 Liber J. p. 144 of Mortgages

MORTGAGE	Mark Curto and Angela his wife - to - Peter Ruppe and Son for \$300.00
December 23, 1891	Liber M , p. 173 of Mortgages Peter Ruppe and Son
DISCHARGE OF MORTGAGE	- to - Mark Curto and Angela his wife
July 5, 1895	Liber S, p. 30 of Mortgages Mark Curto
MORTGAGE	- to - Jeremiah Garvin, of Corfu, Genesee County, New York for \$3000.00, due 5 July 1900
August 21, 1900	Liber Z, p. 480 of Mortgages Jeremiah Garvin of Corfu, Genesee County, New York
DISCHARGE OF MORTGAGE	- to - Mark Curto
July 9, 1900	Liber BB, p. 666 of Mortgages Mark Curto
MORTGAGE	- to - Merchants and Miners Bank for \$6000.00 - interest to be 7%, per annum, the due date of the instrument is not given Witness: Charles K. Shand (the architect) William H. Faucett (notary)
November 7, 1900	Liber 3, p. 141 of Records of Levies, Lis Pendens and Liens Paul P. Roehm Vs. Mark Curto A claim on Roehm's part for \$527.16 for work on a stone and brick building begun 30 May 1900 and completed 31 October 1900, on the parcel in question. Roehm "furnished certain labor and materials in and for building and altering and improving a certain stone and brick building..."
February 11, 1901	Liber 3, p. 141 (margin) of Records of Levies ...

A notation in the system margin of the action immediately above indicates that the claim was paid and the action discharged on February 11, 1901.

August 6, 1915	Liber 2, p. 436 of Sheriff's Deeds Mark Curto, by Sheriff
SHERIFF'S DEED	- to - Merchants and Miners Bank for \$5081.31, in a sale to clear a defaulted mortgage, on which there remained a principle of \$4923.33
May 29, 1925	L 112, p. 491 of Deeds Merchants and Miners Bank
WARRANTY DEED	- to - Mike Shute for \$800.00
April 5, 1932	L 121, p. 327 of Deeds Mike Shute and Mary his wife
WARRANTY DEED	- to - The First National Bank of Calumet for \$1.00, etc.
March 21, 1933	L 119, p. 141 of Deeds The First National Bank of Calumet
QUIT CLAIM DEED	- to - Mike and Mary Shute
September 22, 1969	L 20, p. 333 of Deeds Mary Shute, survivor of herself and Mike Shute
WARRANTY DEED	- to - Mary Shute (the grantor) and Bernard M. Shute, as joint tenants with right of survivorship and not as tenants in common for \$1.00

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Per the lien taken out in 1900, Paul P. Roehm was one of the contractors for the building's construction. Moreover, the storefront was supplied by Mesker & Bro., 423 South Sixth Street, St. Louis, Missouri. On the base of the cast iron pilasters is the legend, "Mesker & Bros (/) Front Builders (/) St. Louis, MO." The firm is also listed in Hendrick's Catalogs for 1894 and 1901.

5. Original plans and construction: The building, in both sections, is a simple and straightforward example of late nineteenth-century and turn-of-the-twentieth century store buildings with rooms above. Originally the space over the front half of the bar was a single room that was rented for many years to at least two different Italian fraternal organizations. Later all the upstairs space was converted to use as a single apartment. In

the basement of the rear half, a large room, also reached from a reasonably good staircase, was used for gambling. A speaking tube provided communication between their room and the bar. The construction of the building, with the exception of the interior of the bar room, is all of good but not exceptional quality.

Since the two halves of the building were erected so near in time they have been discussed in this section, noting, as possible, when different schemes in the bar room were accomplished.

6. Alterations and additions: In 1936, Mike Shute converted the entire upstairs into an apartment for his family. Twenty years later, in 1956, the window for the kitchen was cut into the wall on the north side.

B. Historical events and persons associated with the building

Although this building has been selected primarily for its interior architectural interest, the history of its owners and uses sheds light on the social activities in town around the turn of the twentieth century. Marco Curto was born in Italy in 1855, but was brought to this country by his parents in 1857. According to his obituary, he left the employ of the mining company Calumet and Hecla to go into business for himself in 1893. He was also active in the local Italian immigrant community. In 1890 he and several other men and women with Italian surnames purchased the site on which the Italian Hall in Calumet was erected. In the 1897-98 and 1899-1900 editions of Polk's Directory for Houghton County in which Calumet is located Mark Curto is listed as the president of the Italian Benevolent Society. Also in the 1899-1900 directory, Curto was listed as the Calumet Street Commissioner. This indicates that he was active in village politics as well as Italian community affairs.

In 1897-98, again according to Polk's Directory, four other people named Curto were listed as boarding at Curto's saloon. One of these worked as a clerk for a local firm, two worked as timber men for Calumet and Hecla, and the fourth had no occupation listed which meant that most likely that he was a student. According to his obituary, Curto had eight sons: John, Joseph, James, Dominick, Angelo, Victor, Peter, and Mark. His wife had died in 1894.

In the 1897-98 directory Curto's saloon is just one of forty-six in the village of Calumet. In the 1899-1900 edition, Curto's is one of forty-eight. By the 1903-04 edition there were sixty-three entries slighted. The numbers continued to rise for, by the 1907-08 edition, there were seventy-eight listed. Also included in the directory was Joseph Curto; no vocation was listed for him in 1897-98 but in 1899-1900 his occupation was that of a bartender for Curto's. As the chain of title indicates, in 1900 Curto took a \$6000.00 mortgage with the Merchants and Miners Bank. He died in 1907. By 1915 his heirs had defaulted, and the bank exercised its right and disposed of the holding, to itself, through a Sheriff's sale. Why the bar should have failed, after many years of success, is unclear. It seems likely that the strike of 1913-14 cut into the business, especially since the Italian community was divided over the strike. The Miner's Bulletin, printed by the strikers, had columns written in Italian. At the same time Il Minatore, an anti-strike paper, was also published in Calumet. This was not the kind of strike where one could remain neutral, so regardless of their position, the operators stood to lose some business. Some idea of Curto's

position may be gleaned from the fact that the 1903-04 directory indicates that local 413 of the Cigar Maker's Union met in his upper room the first Friday of each month.

However nearly eighty-five percent of the note was still outstanding in 1915, meaning that for far longer than since 1913 -- possibly since Curto's death in 1907 -- the business had not been able to pay enough to retire the obligation. Whatever the reason, the proprietor was still able to keep the upstairs rented out to several local organizations, in the large single room at the front of the upstairs. The 1916-17 Polk's Directory showed both the Club Alpino Pont and Locana and the Giuseppe Garibaldi Society meeting in the building. Although the bank had taken title, the saloon was still being run by Joseph Curto, probably the son, who also lived upstairs.

In 1919, Joseph and Michael Shute, Yugoslav immigrant brothers, began to operate the "soft drink" bar -- for the Great Experiment had just begun -- on an arrangement with the bank that still retained title to the building. In 1925, Mike Shute alone bought the bar for \$800.00. The relatively low purchase price seems to indicate that the rent Shute had been paying on the bar had been applied to the purchase price of the building. Although no one will talk directly about it, it appears that more than soft drinks were available at the Shute's establishment. Drinking has always been taken very seriously, and in large amounts, in the Copper Country, and it is generally agreed that the Volstead Act was ignored as much as possible.

Mike Shute also continued to rent the upstairs lodge room to various organizations. In 1932, in the depths of the depression, the Shutes were forced to sell their building to The First Rational Bank of Calumet. In 1933, with prohibition repealed, they were able to buy it back. Since then the property was left to Mike's widow, Mary, who has in turn given joint tenancy with right of survivorship to her son Bernard, who now operates the bar in which he was born and raised. For fifty-six of the building's eighty years the Shutes, father and son, have excellently maintained and operated the most beautifully decorated bar in the region.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General statement

1. Architectural character: This well kept 1895 building contains a barroom of exceptional quality. The stained glass canopy over the back bar is most noteworthy and very possibly a unique survival.

2. Condition of fabric: Excellent.

B. Description of exterior

1. Overall dimensions: The two-story structure has a three-bay wide façade and rests on a 19' x 96' rectangular-shaped plan.

2. Foundations: Rubble masonry underpins both the 1895 and 1900 sections of the building. There are poured concrete floors throughout.

3. Walls: At the street level, the first floor of the west (front) façade consists of cast iron and a plate glass shop front and of a doorway, that leads up to the apartment, cut into the south end. Above the first floor, the façade consists of brick laid up in American bond. The west façade has been painted a semi-gloss brick red, with the exception of the metal cornice and sandstone lintels of the second-floor windows that have been painted a semi-gloss chocolate brown. Similar to the appearance of the second-floor, the south elevation is made of deep red-brown colored bricks laid up in American bond. The north elevation, however, is predominantly gray rubble stone with Jacobsville sandstone quoins at the northeast corner. Both the north and south walls are stepped down twice from front to back to correspond to the swoops of the roof.

4. Structural system, framing: The structural system consists of solid, load bearing masonry walls, with 2" x 12" sawn floor joists.

5. Porches, stoops, bulkheads: Entry to the barroom is gained by way of a recessed, central bay. Access to the upstairs apartment is through a door, one step up from street level, cut into the south end of the west façade; the rear apartment door is two steps up from the ground. These steps are made of concrete. A recent cinderblock storage shed of about 4'w x 4'h x 12'l is at the east wall along the alley.

6. Chimneys: There are four chimneys made of brick located along the north wall line of the building.

7. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: Double wood doors each glazed with a single long glass pane open into the bar. The other two doors provide access to the second-floor apartment. Both are paneled wood doors capped by a transom. The elongated transom over the west façade door is glazed with several square colored lights arranged around a central clear pane. The sill of the east (rear) elevation door is made of sandstone while the door itself is framed out in wood. A low brick arch covers the (east) transom.
- b. Windows and shutters: There are no shutters. There is only one window in the north elevation; it is located on the second floor and provides light to the apartment kitchen. This window was put in 1956. It is a fixed metal-framed window inserted in the walls. While the two second-floor, east elevation windows resemble those seen in the south elevation, the four first-floor openings are a series of wood-framed windows with no true wall surface separating them. The windows each have a brick side framing, a cast metal "I" beam with rosettes for a lintel, and a sill made of two equal-sized sandstone blocks. All of the window openings in the south elevation have brick side frames, row locked lintels, and sandstone sills. The windows themselves are wood frame, double-hung, except in the basement. Two of the basement window openings have been bricked up and two have had glass blocks inserted. Above the shop front, the windows of the west façade are similar to others in the building except

the lintels are made of sandstone. The two shop front windows are large plate glass windows positioned on either side of the bar doorway. Above these, and above the door, are ribbed and clouded glass lights.

8. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: Flat, slight slope to the rear (east), covered by felt composition paper and tar.

b. Cornice, eaves: On the north, east and south walls they are of square profile brick of no distinction. On the street (west) wall the cornice is of cast metal with a variety of interesting finials, dentils and other decorative motifs.

c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: None.

B. Description of interior

1. Floor plans: See figs. 1-3.

2. Stairways: There are two stairways in the building, each of which has flights to each floor. The stair at the southwest corner, with entrance in the west wall and flights running parallel to the south wall, provides access to the upstairs apartment from the entry door on the street. It may also be entered from a small door in the south bay of the storefront. Underneath this stair is a stair, entered from the bar, which leads to the basement. It appears that this stair has been cut through since this part of the building was erected, but precisely when is not ascertainable from interview, research or examination. This stair is of very primitive construction, while that to the apartment over it is simple and without adornment.

The other stair, at the northeast corner of the building, has the outside entrance in the east wall, and the flights run parallel to the north wall. Modest newel posts, balusters, and railings are on both of these flights. The stair up to the apartment, besides being entered from the east wall, may also be entered through a door off the back room of the bar. Three steps up this flight there is another door, providing additional privacy to the upstairs apartment. The stair down is entered from a door about mid-way in the back room of the bar.

3. Flooring: The basement floors are made of poured concrete; linoleum covers the concrete in the gaming room. On the first floor, there is a recent vintage linoleum tile in the front half and 2 ½" hardwood flooring, with no finish, in the back room. On the second floor, there is 2" hardwood flooring in the front half, but only 4" sub-flooring in the back. Both sections have linoleum or carpeting covering the floors as well.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: The basement walls are the rubble foundation walls generally, except in the gaming room and back hall, where there is painted board and bead wainscoting with painted plaster wall surfaces above. The ceilings in the gaming room

and the hall are plaster, which has been painted. There are no true ceilings in the rest of the basement. On the first floor the walls are more ornate. They are a combination of board and bead wainscoting and plaster. The approximately 42" to 48" high wainscoting has been stained a dark hue and has been highly polished. Above the wainscoting, the plaster walls have been painted. The ceiling is made of plaster with a molded plaster and metal cornice [crown molding] incorporating a variety of simple and complex lines and curves. The plaster walls and ceilings, as well as the decorative cornice work, are painted a cream semi-gloss. On the second floor, the walls and ceilings of the rooms are plaster and have been painted. However, the bathroom walls consist of ceramic tile and the kitchen walls are covered with linoleum arranged in a tile pattern.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: All doorways are wood framed. All doors are made of wood, many with five horizontal panels. The doors to the public toilets at the back of the bar room are wood framed with frosted glass panels. Many door handles are cast metal in a foliate/scroll pattern typical of the era.

6. Decorative features and trim: The design and workmanship throughout is of good quality. However it is the exceptional quality of the back bar and its canopy which distinguish this building. While less distinguished, and not unique, the ceiling in the bar rooms is also notable. In each section of the bar (which is separated by a flight of four steps) there are two raised circles of painted and raised pressed tin, which have sockets in them for light bulbs, which surround an elaborate molded plaster hexagon of floral elements. Light fixtures were originally hung from the center of these hexagons. The cornice [crown molding] around the entire bar is of the same materials as the ceiling decorations. They are a combination of classically derived elements, including modillions, dentils, and bead and reel and egg and dart moldings. Separating the two rooms of the bar is a low arch, also decorated in a manner similar to the ceiling and cornice. Light sockets are spaced all along the intrados. Slightly different cartouches are placed at the center on either side of the arch. The arches seem to be supported by paired herms on either side, which taper toward the bottom. Virtually every surface of this archway is embellished with applied plaster moldings in a variety of patterns. Most of these are floral, floriated or scrolled

The bar, about twenty-five feet long, is divided into five sections by engaged piers set equally along its curved vertical surface. The bar is highly polished mahogany, dark stained red oak. There is a six-inch marble kick plate at the floor, which contains screw holes, possibly for a brass rail. The current owner, who was brought up over the bar, cannot remember there ever being a brass rail however.

The back bar is made up of three major elements. Two of these are identical side elements, flanking the center section. Each side section is flanked by two columns of smooth shafts and acanthus leaf capitals. The entablature over these capitals, and extending over the center section as well, has spiral foliate scrolls over the capitals with a cornice of dentils and egg and dart bands. The columns frame a semi hexagonal liquor

case with glass panels in the sides and a round-headed, glass door in the center. Framing this door are ionic pilasters. There are mirrors at the back of these cases. Below this center section is a wooden storage cabinet with three drawers in the center and single doors on the sides. Above each cabinet is a bombe -style element, which is itself, surmounted by a cartouche and strap work at the level of the flanking column capitals.

The main section of the back bar is fabulous. The entablature, which was stepped back from the side elements, and is relatively unadorned, steps forwards in the middle to display a foliate raised pattern element with a smooth raised oval at the center. Below is a plate glass mirror of about 5' high by 15' long. Hanging over the mirror is a stained glass canopy. It is bracketed and framed with copper. It is in five main sections. Three are suspended, next to each other, horizontally. The two side sections, one on each side, are approximately triangular and are perpendicular to the floor and wall. They are like the sidepiece of an awning. Lead separates the individual pieces of glass. At the edges of each section there are alternating roundels of red and blue faceted glass. The background glass of the panels seem to be a varicolored but predominantly green brick wall, with leafy tendrils, of ribbed gold glass spread over this brick surface. A vine on a garden wall is the base of the idea. At the center of the middle sections is a yellow orange oval with a red swag across it. In the flanking sections there are curves of red roundels, seemingly long flowers, such as lupines or wisteria. The overall effect is astonishing and bedazzling. Below the mirror is a straightforward back bar with refrigerator cabinets for beer and mixers below. On the back bar is an ornate National Cash Register installed in 1900.

7. Hardware: The stained glass canopy is held up in part by two turned metal (probably bronze) hooks, which are attached to the wall by lion head standards. The table bases, of cast iron, were manufactured by the Brunswick Balke Collender Company of Chicago.

8. Mechanical equipment:

a. Heating: Steam boiler.

b. Lighting: Electric, mostly original. This was originally incorporated into the ceiling decorations. Now some fluorescent and incandescent fixtures have been added.

c. Plumbing: There is a handsome washbowl in the men's toilet and a copper lined sink under the bar.

D. Site

The building is on the east side of a north-south street, facing west towards the street. The street is a typically wide (80') mid-western street. The concrete sidewalk is also more than ample, measuring about twelve feet. There are no street plantings. On the north and south sides are empty lots with well-tended grass. Some vines are growing on the side of the building on the south side. At the east side is a service alley. Elsewhere on this block are several notable buildings of the same era as the bar (1890-1910).

1. Historic landscape design: None.
2. Outbuildings: None.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Primary sources:

Interview with owner/manager, Bernard Shute, 23 June 1975.

Photograph of Mark Curto's very extended family, taken in front of the bar in 1910. A print is mounted at the bar today.

B. Secondary sources:

Obituary of Mark Curto. Copper Country Evening News. 2 March 1907.

Polk's Directory of Houghton County. 1897-98, 1899-1900, 1903-04, 1916-17.

Stevens, Horace J. The Copper Handbook, vol. II, 1901. Houghton: Horace J. Stevens, 1902. pp. 4, 21.

Turner, Arthur. Calumet Copper and People. Hancock, MI: The Book Concern, 1914.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

Documentation was done in the summer of 1975 by Kevin Harrington and Wendy Nicholas for the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER), a division of the National Park Service.

Fig. 1 Basement floor plan. Drawing by author, 1975.

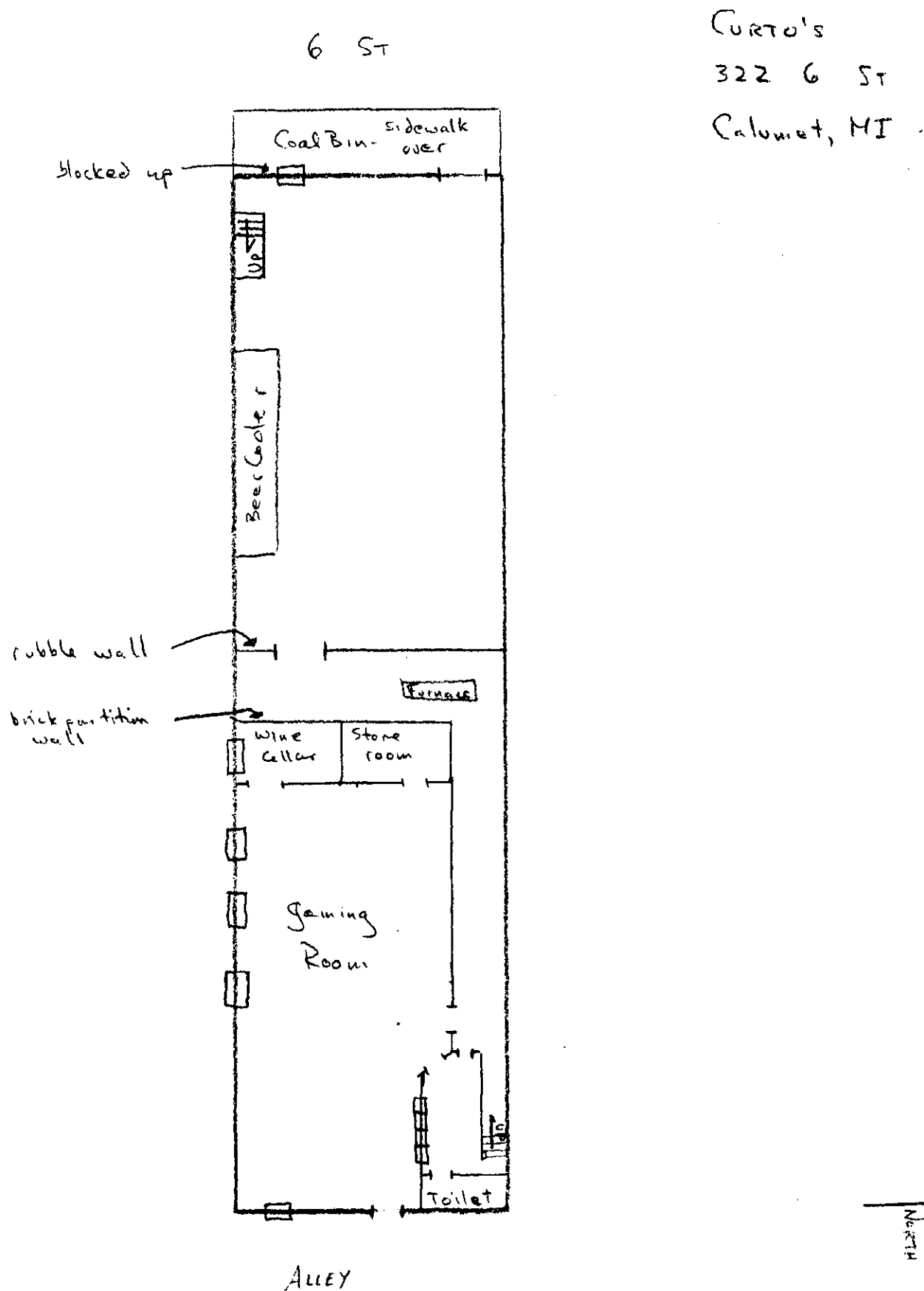


Fig. 2 First floor plan. Drawing by author, 1975.

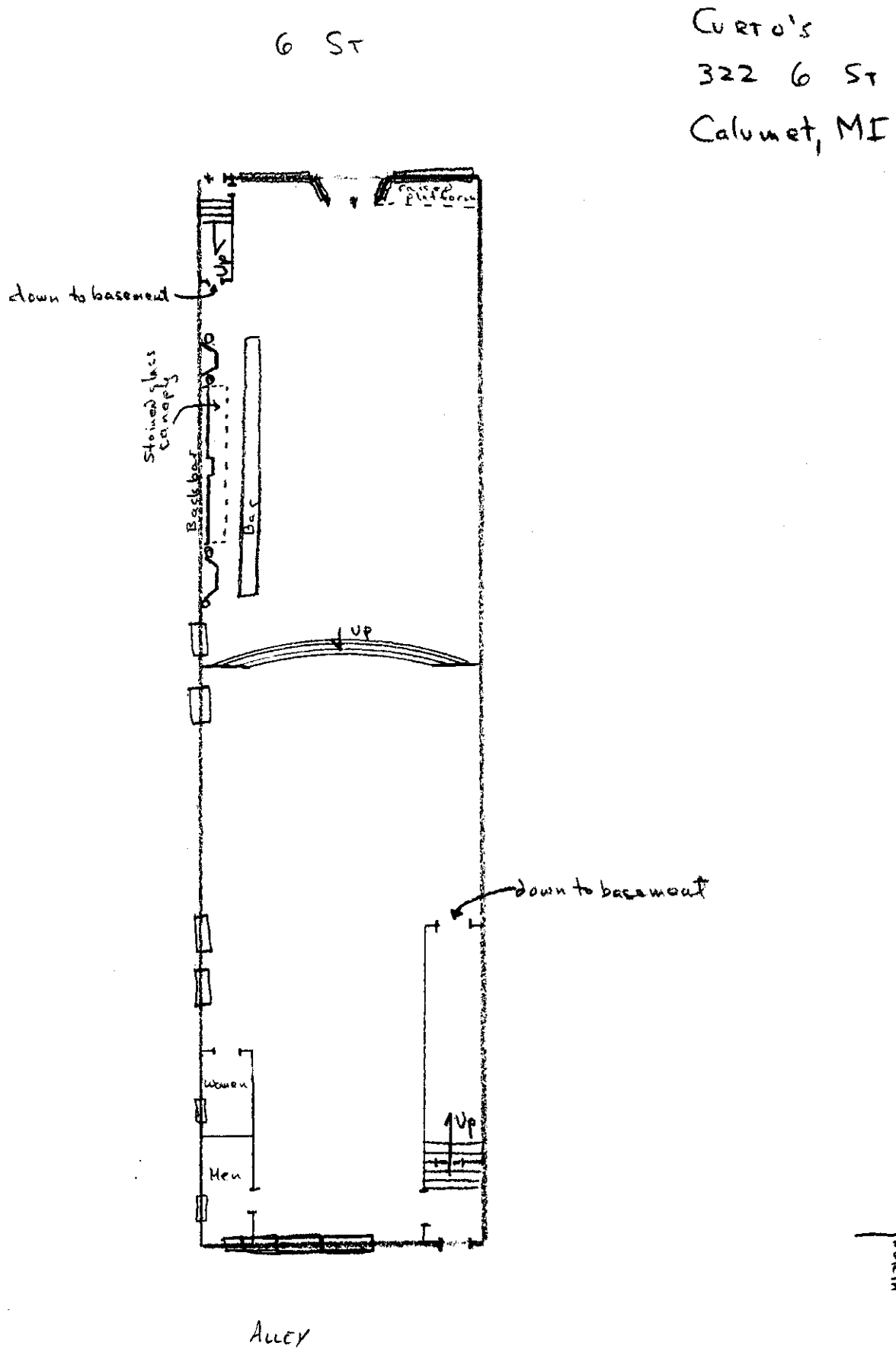


Fig. 3 Second floor plan. Drawing by author, 1975.

CURTO'S
322 6 ST
Calumet, MI

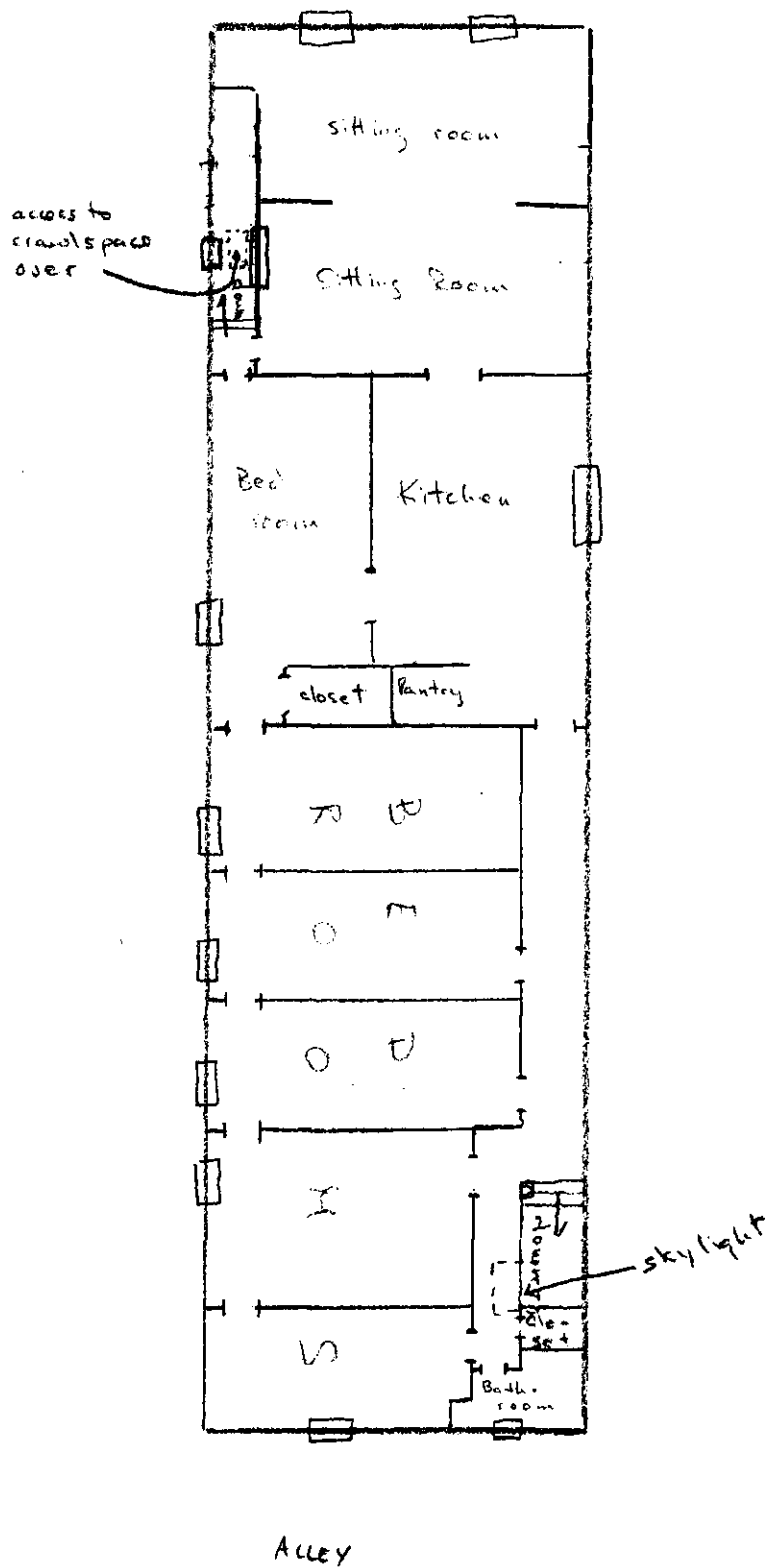


Fig. 4 Perspective view of west (front) façade, looking south to north. Photograph by author, 1975.

